

THE LODGER IN NUMBER ELEVEN.

BY KATE JORDAN.

MISS PICKERWICK lived in a garret in a decayed mansion which stood at the corner of upper Bleecker Street and one of the queer little byways with a forgotten name running across that dingy New York thoroughfare.

It was springtime. The dormer windows were open, and on each window-sill stood a small flower-pot, the sturdy blossoms making a bit of color that was very effective beside the gauzy curtains of cheese-cloth. An old mahogany dresser, to which Miss Pickerwick had clung most tenaciously, even when she was hungry, stood in a corner, polished so beautifully by her own delicate hands that it shone like a dusky mirror. There were a few old blue plates, too, saved from the wreckage of her affluence.

As for Miss Pickerwick herself, she was in harmony with the refinement and coziness of her garret room. Her collars and cuffs were of her own embroidering, and her best silk gown, turned so many times that it was now of a color not in the calendar, fitted her spare, graceful figure with a smoothness that told of long acquaintance with every line. She had a smile that old people and children warmed to, and a voice, a touch of hand, that made homeless cats and dogs adopt her as their own as soon as they came within the radius of either.

Nevertheless, this gentle Miss Pickerwick, who made scarfs or did fine sewing for a living, who painted china when anyone wanted it, and had been known to make over old hats at very low prices, thought herself quite a cynic. She thought all men fickle and faithless—except her young cousin Ralph. She thought all actresses wicked—she had known only one. The reason for these fixed antipathies tells her story.

Years before—ah, how many, many years before!—she had lived in this very house where now she rented a garret. Then it had been the mansion of her father, a prosperous lawyer, and she had been his petted daughter. In this house she had loved. In this house she had first known what it was to taste the cup of pain. No one remembered the story now—except Miss Pickerwick.

"David Townsend" was the name written across a *carte de visite* photo-

graph at the bottom of a cedar box which an uncle of Miss Pickerwick's had brought years ago from Palestine. The picture showed a handsome, reckless type of the ultra-fashionable young man of the late sixties. The face had poetry and fire in it; the very pose of the head was impulsive. He seemed a man who would make bitter mistakes and eat the kernel of despair in unavailable regret for them.

This is just what David Townsend did, no doubt, when he jilted pretty Rosanna Pickerwick for Mlle. Delaphine, the dancer at the Bowery Theater who walked on the hearts of the young men of that day. You will understand now why Miss Pickerwick hated the words "actress" and "theater."

She stopped sewing when a barrel-organ paused under her window and began churning out "Her Bright Smile Haunts Me Still." The old, old song that so many girls had sung to their sweethearts in the long ago seemed to speak in reawakened tenderness to the old house, and also to Miss Pickerwick's heart. She had caroled that old song to David Townsend many a time, his eyes glowing as he listened.

"It is years since last we met,
We may never meet again.
I have struggled to forget,
But the struggle was in vain."

"Never meet again!" her thoughts ran. "Never, indeed!"

The needle fell unheeded to the floor as she began to think of the second chapter of her life's story—the dark chapter after the blow fell, when she had to bear the stigma of "jilted." She had carried her head high, though her heart seemed no longer to beat under its load of pain. Her cold, proud face was a defiance to the curious, pitying eyes of her friends. By degrees, when people had dared speak David's name to her, she heard he had circulated a story that she had dismissed him. She remembered now that she had thought him merciful, though weak and false, and she had not contradicted the rumor.

She picked up the needle and went on with her task.

"If he is living, I suppose he is still in Paris. Wasn't it in seventy-seven

that Abby Sheldon ran across him on the stairs of the Grand Opéra? Yes, he was living there then. Then it was eighty-four when Mary Fitzwilliam wrote to me from Rome, saying he was living in a pension there, his wife dead, most of his money gone. Ah, he's probably dead by this time!" She stitched diligently. "I wonder if he was happy—I wonder if he ever regretted—" and her thoughts trailed away into thin imaginings.

There was a hurried little tip-tap at the door. It was Ralph's individual knock, so that she would not hesitate to admit him. The same timidity that always made her look under her bed at night, although it was scarcely ten inches from the floor, and could be the hiding-place of only the most attenuated marauder, made her keep her door locked constantly.

"I stay here because of old association," Miss Pickerwick had explained at times; "but some of the lodgers seem to be doubtful people, and tipplers."

She hurried over and turned the key, her face very happy. She loved Ralph—his youth, his handsome face, his talent, his ambition to be a great sculptor.

"Why, Ralph," she said as she shook his hand, drawing him in, "I didn't expect a visit to-day. This is a pleasant surprise to your old cousin."

"I was down after an Italian model—thought I'd look in," said Ralph with a touch of confusion as he sat down.

"Can you have a bite of lunch with me, dear?"

"Of course. Tea and toast? I'll be delighted."

When the little table was set, Miss Pickerwick became suddenly aware of a surprising thing, which she had failed to notice in her hurry.

"Why, Ralph," she exclaimed, "have not you on your best gray suit?—and a white flower in your button-hole? What does it mean?"

"Why, it means, Cousin Rosie, that besides hunting for a model I've been calling on a young lady who lives in this very house."

"Whom can you possibly know *here*, Ralph?" and she stared at him.

"Don't you know the people in No. 11, first floor?" he asked.

"I make no acquaintances among the lodgers here. They are mostly foreigners."

From Miss Pickerwick's untraveled, ultra-Puritan standpoint, foreign birth was eminently undesirable.

"Foreigners?" Ralph laughed. "Why,

auntie, you've no idea what nice people live in other countries. Now this girl—Eugénie—is French."

Miss Pickerwick thought of Mlle. Delaphine and her very educated toes.

"Have nothing to do with her, my dear Ralph," she said, setting her mouth primly. "Frenchwomen are butterflies."

"She's a peach!" said Ralph tenderly and with boyish warmth.

"A what?"

"Well, I mean she's just right. Her eyes are just like amethysts—I never saw such eyes!"

Miss Pickerwick leaned forward and transfixed him with as stern a look as she was capable of.

"What about her character?" she demanded.

"She has character to burn!"

"Is that slang?" Miss Pickerwick asked helplessly. "I don't understand."

"Yes, I suppose it is, and not very elegant; but I mean she has heaps of character. Why, do you know, after singing her little part every night in an opera, she comes home and nurses her sick father; and in the daytime she makes—*straw hats!*" Ralph delivered the last words with an air which seemed to count out any further contradiction. "If that isn't character, if it isn't sweetness, if it isn't courage, if it isn't being a brick, then show me what is! I tell you Eugénie is adorable! She's a witch, a saint, as merry as a kitten, as wise as a philosopher, and—and—she has the miserable fate to love *me!*"

He knew that this would create consternation, and it did, but not the sort Ralph had expected. To his amaze she sat back quietly, a pallor almost bluish stealing over the sweet, patient face.

"A Frenchwoman—an actress?" she said in a voice scarcely above a whisper, and then she looked past Ralph into the distance—into years of which he could know nothing.

"What's the matter?" he asked, springing up and taking her hands, which were closed and cold.

"It seems strange that you should have chosen this girl of all others, because—because—"

"Well? Tell me, Cousin Rosie. You look so strange! You've never even seen Eugénie, I'm sure!"

"I'm not thinking of her," she said, holding his hands fast, and letting her gray eyes look deep down into his heart. "I'm thinking of the ruin a woman made of my life—a Frenchwoman, an actress."

"Why, Cousin Rosie!"

"You never heard my story, Ralph. Every one belonging to both of us is gone, and my embittered heart, my useless life, were important failures only to myself. But you see, dear, why I feel almost an uncanny terror of this girl you love. She is not the one I would have chosen for you. Is she worthy of you? Will she make your life happy? How can she, a foreigner, a girl of the theater, help or understand you in your career?"

Ralph was touched to the very core of his warm heart. He could have tried to overcome her objections with a jest and a laugh, had they been merely dislikes formed from her prim, narrow outlook; but this glimpse of the disillusioned self which she had kept so long and so proudly hidden awakened new thoughts.

He drew his chair over to Miss Pickerwick's, and wheedled from her some of the facts of her love story. She had told only a few things—her lover's name, the dancer's name—when a slow light of comprehension stole over Ralph's face.

When the story was done he looked at Miss Pickerwick, an unwonted tenderness mixed with a strange excitement in his blue eyes.

"You have never seen this David Townsend since—since he married?"

"Never. He went to Paris to live. I remained here. No, indeed; that pain was spared me," said Miss Pickerwick, rising with a sigh. "And now, dear, that you have listened to my old maid's love tale, you will know how the thought of any similarity between your wife and the woman who dazzled David Townsend, and drew him away from me, could only cause me pain."

"Yes, I understand," said Ralph, and there was still that strange look of excitement in his eyes. "But believe me, dear Cousin Rosie, you misjudge my sweetheart. Wait until you see her. She earns her living by singing to support her father, because God has given her the gift of a beautiful voice. She's as pure as a violet. The theater need not be a den of iniquity, Cousin Rosie. Believe me, young as I am, I've learned that you can find in a place just what you bring to it. Eugénie comes and goes upon her way as a singer, but in heart and at home she is just a simple girl, true, womanly, proud, and sweet."

Miss Pickerwick sat down, her hands folded primly.

"I see you have made up your mind," she said with a little sigh. "You are your own master, of course. What favor do you want to ask of me?"

"Well, it's just this," said Ralph slowly. "You have been asking me about Eugénie, and you're awfully afraid I'm making a mistake. Now her father is coming to you to make inquiries about me, because he's afraid Eugénie may be making a mistake."

"Her father?" and Miss Pickerwick gave a little shiver of distaste.

"Yes!" Ralph burst out into a peal of boyish laughter. "Oh, I suppose you see him in your mind's eye—a swarthy, mincing Frenchman of the most objectionable sort. Perhaps you think he wears earrings."

Miss Pickerwick passed her hand tremblingly over her face.

"I speak so little French now——"

"He speaks English as well as you do." Ralph's tone was full of anticipation and mystery, although Miss Pickerwick did not realize it. "Will you see him?"

"When?"

"Now."

"Oh!" The unusualness of the coming episode flushed her cheek. "Very well," she added gently; "if you wish it, dear. But give me time to put away the lunch things and tidy up a bit."

Ralph went to the door, and then he paused and looked at Miss Pickerwick. She was frail, and no longer young. A great surprise might shock her spent heart dangerously; and he had a great surprise in store for her.

Impulsively he went back to her side and put his strong, masterful arms around her, kissing her warmly.

"See here, Cousin Rosie, something wonderful is going to happen to you—something wonderful. Now don't ask any questions, but be prepared!"

He fled from the room before she could speak. Miss Pickerwick remained standing where he had left her. She pondered over Ralph's last words, but without reaching their meaning. Then she brushed her soft blond hair, and fastened her embroidered collar with the cameo brooch worn only on special occasions.

When a quiet but decided knock came upon her door she gave a nervous start. A thrill ran through her whole system, opening her gray eyes with expectancy, and making a rosy bloom leap to her wan cheek, so that for a moment she looked more like the Rosanna Pickerwick of other days than she had done in years.

It was well that she did; for when her door opened, admitting a gray-haired man in well-fitting but worn clothes, she knew that the Past had entered—that it

was looking at her from under the visitor's brows with the dark, unquenchable, never-to-be-forgotten eyes of David Townsend.

For a moment the two stood, like ghosts come back, and gazed at each other. A miracle had happened. It was the man who spoke first.

"You—are Ralph Morton's cousin?"

"Yes; and—you—" she faltered.

"I'm Eugénie's father."

He placed his hat on the table just in time to assist Miss Pickerwick as she swayed in trying to reach a chair. As she rallied, their hands touched.

"We meet again here," David was saying, "in the old house."

"How long have you been here?" Miss Pickerwick asked, when she could.

"Since before Christmas—four or five months. When I came back to New York with Eugénie, I wandered through this old neighborhood, now so sadly changed. When I saw this, your old home, rented out in rooms, I settled here with my daughter." He looked at her with sudden yearning. "Are you sorry? Do you want me to go away?"

"I wonder why you came. This is a house I should have thought you'd try to forget," said Miss Pickerwick, trying to be very stern.

"But why should I wish to forget? All these years I've thought tenderly of you, in spite of the letter you sent casting me off to pay the price of my folly."

"Cast you off? Folly?" Miss Pickerwick asked, sitting upright.

"Surely you haven't forgotten," said David. "I confess I acted like a young fool, and deserved to be dismissed; but now, in the twilight of our lives, I may tell you the truth—it was you I loved, Rosanna. I loved you then, and I love you still."

As she listened in amaze it seemed to Miss Pickerwick that life had turned back many chapters.

"When your letter came breaking the engagement—" David continued.

"Letter!" Miss Pickerwick's lips tried to murmur in denial.

"I think I went mad with grief. Then I wrote you, begging an interview. You wrote back a refusal. I thought I hated you then, and in my pain and wrath I married Delaphine."

Miss Pickerwick was silent; but her memory was busy. She recalled how, fifteen years before, her Aunt Betty, with whom she had lived then, had tried on her death-bed to tell her niece something about a letter. Now it was all clear.

Aunt Betty, thinking David too inconstant and reckless to make a good husband, had sent those letters to keep Rosanna from what she thought would be a wretched marriage!

Miss Pickerwick pondered on the situation. Should she tell David the truth? No! Wise and feminine to the core, she determined to shield Aunt Betty. She sat perfectly quiet, dropped her lashes, a smile nicking the corners of her mouth.

As David leaned nearer and kissed her hand with the grace that men have lost in these rushing modern days, her heart stirred under the caress like a bird in the spring.

"Don't you think, Rosanna, that God has sent us to each other at last?"

In the back parlor with No. 11 marked in white letters on the big mahogany door, the younger lovers waited for the return of Eugénie's father.

"Oh, it is such a happy day!" said Eugénie, her hand in Ralph's as they listened for his step. "You know this morning there came news of a legacy to my papa from his great-aunt, enough to buy us all a pretty house in the country. It is wonderful—wonderful that your cousin and he are old sweethearts—wonderful about the money—"

"Wonderful, most wonderful that you love me!" Ralph added.

The hours crept along until it was almost twilight, and still Eugénie's father had not come.

"They have forgotten us," said Ralph. "They have so much to talk of—a whole lifetime since they've seen each other."

"Let's creep up-stairs," said Eugénie. And they did, hand in hand. But outside Miss Pickerwick's door they paused. First they heard a woman's voice, speaking very softly.

"And do you remember, David, that day—"

Then there came a murmur and a low, happy laugh that Ralph could hardly recognize as his elderly cousin's. Next a man's voice said:

"And the night of the ball to the Grand Duke Alexis—you wore white with such a lot of roses. Ah, dearest, don't you remember?"

The boy and girl looked into each other's faces in a startled way, almost with awe, as they stole away more softly even than they had come. On the threshold of No. 11 they paused, and Ralph took his sweetheart's face into the circle of his hands as he looked into her eyes.

"Sweetheart, may we love so—when we are old."